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## THE POSTEXILIC HISTORY OF ISRAEL. X.

By Professor WILLIS J. BEECHER, D. D.,

Auburn Theol. Seminary, Auburn, N. Y.

## LITERARY WORK FROM NEHEMIAH TO THE MACCABEES.

We have already seen (STUDENT for January, 1890) that the accounts which have been handed down to us attribute great literary activity, in the production both of Scripture and of Midrash, to the times of Nehemiah. Further, no one disputes that there was great literary activity among the Jews, especially in Palestine and in Egypt, throughout the century that followed the first outbreak of the Maccabæan wars. But in regard to the hundred and fifty years before the Maccabæan period, every thing is in dispute. The most important cases are those of several of the Apocryphal books, and the case of the Septuagint.

*The first part of the book of Baruch.*—This Apocryphal book consists of three parts: First, a description of an occasion, 1: 1-14; Second, a prayer adapted to the occasion, 1: 15-3: 8; Third, a hymn or series of hymns, 3: 9-5: 9. The occasion is perhaps described as occurring in the fifth year after the burning of the temple,\* that is, B. C. 581, the year after Nebuzar-adan carried away 745 captives, Jer. 52: 30. Arrangements were in contemplation for reëstablishing the worship in Jerusalem, in the hands of Jews who should be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. With this in view, on the tenth day of the third month (1: 8), the king handed over certain silver vessels which Zedekiah had made for the temple, that these might be returned to Jerusalem. A collection of money was made among the Babylonian Jews, to defray expenses. On the seventh day of the fifth month, the anniversary of the setting of the temple on fire (1: 2 cf. 2 Kgs. 25: 8), there was a public assembly of the Babylonian Jews, at

\*So it is possible to understand the words "in the fifth year, on the seventh day of the month, at the time when the Chaldeans took Jerusalem, and burnt it with fire," 1: 2.

which the captive king Jeconiah was present; Baruch read the book, and the assembly commended it to their brethren in Jerusalem.

Roman Catholic writers have generally held that the book is historical, and was written by Baruch; and their view is capable of being pretty strongly defended. Probably, however, a fair majority opinion among scholars regards Baruch 1: 1-3: 8 as a pseudepigraph, written in Hebrew late in the Persian period, and translated into Greek at some later time.

*Baruch in Greek, the second part of Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah, Tobit, the Prayer of Manasseh, the additions to Daniel and Esther, First Esdras.*—These writings by no means stand on an even footing one with another, but they all have some claim, and none of them an undisputed claim, to be regarded as pre-Maccabæan. Their silence in regard to the events of those times, and their lack of the Maccabæan or the Tanaite spirit, are arguments for their earlier date, whose value varies according to the character of the several books. They are all either translations from the Hebrew or Aramaic, or else the work of Greek-speaking Hebrews, it being a matter of dispute to which of these classes some of them belong. That they all came into existence in Greek, either after the Septuagint, or as a part of the literary movement by which the Septuagint was produced, seems to be a fair inference from the character of the Greek in which they are written.

*Ecclesiasticus.*—To the Biblical student this is one of the most important books in existence, outside the Bible itself. Not to enter upon any minute criticism, it was written in Hebrew, and translated into Greek soon after "the thirty-eighth year upon king Euergetes." (Prologue). Some experts in Greek say that this cannot possibly denote the year of the reign of Euergetes, while others say that it can denote nothing else than the regnal year. It is further in dispute whether the king referred to is Euergetes I. or Physcon. Prevailing opinion now dates the translation a little later than the thirty-eighth year of Physcon, that is about 130 B. C. Its Greek is of the same general type with that of the books in the preceding list. Opinion is not quite so uniform as to the date when the book was written in Hebrew, whether

strictly by the "grandfather" of the translator, or by a more remote ancestor. There seems to be an agreement that the description of "Simon the son of Onias," chap. 50, is contemporaneous; and this dates the book either about 300 or about 200 B. C., according as we refer it to the one or the other highpriest of this name. In any event, the book is pre-Maccabæan. In such a work, silence as to the events of the Maccabæan times would have been impossible, if the work had been written after those events.

The writer and the translator alike are men who glory in Israelitish history and institutions, and at the same time manifest a liberal spirit toward non-Jewish peoples. They are ready to learn from every source whence wisdom can be had, and are also desirous to attract the attention of intelligent Greeks to the excellencies of Israelitish institutions. The existence of this spirit, in these times, is a factor in the case that should not be overlooked.

*Jewish-Greek contact in Egypt.*—The books of Jeremiah and Kings informs us that, in Nebuchadnezzar's time, there was a large Jewish migration to Egypt. Recent discoveries render it probable that at that time, or even earlier, there was more or less of contact of Jews with Greeks in Egypt. But however this may be, at least Josephus is entirely credible when he informs us that, under Alexander the Great, large numbers both of Jews and Samaritans went to Egypt, and that Alexander, when he founded Alexandria, gave them especial privileges in that city; that large numbers also migrated to Egypt in the time of Ptolemy Lagus; that upon the founding of Antioch there was a sharp competition between the Syrian-Greek cities and the Egyptian-Greek cities for desirable Jewish immigrants. These accounts may be exaggerated and inaccurate, but there can be no doubt that, early in the third century B. C., there was a large and high class Jewish and Samaritan population in Alexandria and Egypt.

This migration of Jews to Alexandria began at a time when the oldest people living could still recollect the great movement in Israelitish sacred literature, which took place under Ezra and Nehemiah. It also began with the very generation that participated in the Samaritan schism and the

founding of the temple at Gerizzim. Josephus is doubtless correct when he says that there were theological controversies in Alexandria between the Jews and the Samaritans, and that they sent gifts, respectively, to the two temples at Jerusalem and at Gerizzim. These facts would render it a very important matter for the Alexandrian Jews to pay attention to their national sacred literature.

Their relations to the Greeks would strengthen this tendency. Alexander and his successors were ambitious to make Alexandria the centre of Greek learning and culture. They offered great inducements to distinguished Greeks to live there or visit there. They purchased choice manuscripts at large prices, sometimes making these the object of treaties with the cities that owned such treasures. Demetrius Phalereus, in the time of Ptolemy Lagus, became the leading spirit in work of this sort. The great library was founded, and there is no reason to think that ancient authors mis-state the design of it when they say that the Ptolemies intended to gather into it copies of all books existing in the world. This atmosphere must have been very stimulating to intelligent Alexandrian Jews, conscious that they possessed a national literature no way inferior to that of the Greeks. This was especially true of those among them who were of kindred spirit to the son of Sirach.

Of course, the first generation of Jews and Samaritans, born in Alexandria, became Greek-speaking. They needed to use their Scriptures in Greek both in their private studies and devotions, in their theological controversies, and in any discussions they might have with Greeks. In the circumstances it is incredible that some of the Alexandrian Greeks should not at once become interested in both the history and the literature of Israel. For a time fragmentary translations, largely oral, would answer every purpose ; but there was sure to come a time when both theology and literature would make their demand for a more formal and complete turning of the Israelite writings into Greek.

*The Septuagint.*—Out of this condition of things sprang the so-called Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, and the considerations just mentioned will assist us in estimating the traditional account of its origin.

The principal source of tradition concerning the Septuagint is the so-called letter of Aristæus. Copies of the English translation of this are very rare. Copies of it in Greek, with Latin translation, may be found in many libraries, in Hody on the Septuagint, or in the Bibliotheca of Fabricius. The account of Josephus, *Ant.* XII. ii., is mainly a free transcription of parts of Aristæus. According to this account, Demetrius Phalereus moved Ptolemy (Josephus says Ptolemy Philadelphus, but the letter leaves this to inference) to put a choice copy of the Jewish books in the Alexandrian library. To accomplish this, the king first purchased and set free immense numbers of Jews who were held as slaves in Egypt, and then sent an embassy to Jerusalem with magnificent presents. The writer of the letter professes to be a Greek, and one of the delegation. He describes the journey, and gives an account of various Palestinian matters and traditions. On their return, the highpriest sent seventy elders with the delegation, with a wonderfully fine copy of the sacred books. The king feasted these elders royally, gave them especial facilities for their work, and after the work was finished, at the wish of the Alexandrian Jews, gave it an official sanction. The body of the letter, however, is its account of the questions discussed at the royal table ; the narrative parts of it are subsidiary—a device to obtain a suitable setting for the philosophical discussions.

It is incorrect to call this letter a forgery. It is merely a fiction, designed to give interest to certain discussions. No one doubts that its author was a Jew ; it is disputed whether he lived early or late in the second century B. C. Josephus evidently accepted his account as historical, and it was generally so accepted till the publication of the work of Hody in 1684. A few years ago there was a strong disposition among scholars to consider the whole account fabulous. But a better opinion of it, I think, now prevails. What we should expect in such a fiction is a colored and exaggerated presentation of the facts as commonly known, and not a story out of whole cloth. The rabbinical traditions occasionally refer to the writing of the Law of Ptolemy. Philo mentions some of the events as given in Aristæus, but adds a statement as to the

miraculous agreement of the translation with the original. In the accounts of the Christian fathers this becomes a miraculous agreement among the translators in the points in which they departed from the Hebrew. Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria cite the Jewish philosopher Aristobulus as writing to Ptolemy Philometer (B. C. 180-146) that Plato had been a student of the Law, that parts of it had been translated before "Alexander and the Persians", and that the whole translation was made in the times of Philadelphus, Demetrius Phalereus being active in the matter, Migne xxi. 1098, viii. 781, 889 sq. And Clement doubtless represents trustworthy Alexandrian tradition when he says :—

"They say the Scriptures, both of the Law and the prophetical, to have been interpreted from the dialect of the Hebrews into the Greek tongue in the time of king Ptolemy Lagus. or, as some say, of the one called Philadelphus, Demetrius Phalereus bringing to this the greatest ambition, and providing for the interpretation," *Stromata*, Migne viii. 894.

*Points concerning the Septuagint.*—Disentangling the true from the fabulous, I think the following points may fairly be accepted.

1. The translation was made by Alexandrian Jews. This is contrary to the traditions, but the peculiarities of the Greek which the translators have given us, and those of their Hebrew scholarship, put it beyond question.

2. Demetrius Phalereus and the Alexandrian library had something to do with it. Some of the details concerning Demetrius, in the Aristæan account, are certainly false. It is often said that he can have had nothing to do with the matter, because he was banished and put to death directly upon the accession of Philadelphus. This statement is but partly correct, though it is doubtless true that the career of Demetrius at Alexandria ended very soon after the death of Lagus. But there is nothing to discredit the idea that, during the two or three years of the life of Lagus after Philadelphus became king, Demetrius may have retained his position at Alexandria. This being the state of evidence, it is most natural to hold that he really had to do with the plan for the Jewish sacred books, and that it was made during those years, B. C. 285-283. That is to say, in addition to all demands for a

Greek Old Testament for religious purposes, some plan was made for putting the books into the library, and some correspondence was had with the Palestinian Jews for this purpose.

At this point, the traditions make two statements that have been too generally overlooked: a. That Ptolemy desired and secured accurate transcriptions for his library, as well as a translation into Greek, *Jos., Ant. XII. ii. 2, 1, 4, 13*, Epiphanius in *Migne xliii. 242, 374*, et al.

b. That the pains he took was for the securing of an accurate text, there being plenty of inferior texts already accessible, *Ant. XII. ii. 4* et al.

If these statements be accepted as historical, and there is no reason for not accepting them, then the transcription may probably enough have been the work of Palestinian Jews, though most of the translation was certainly not their work. There is even no improbability, considering the disputes then prevalent between the Samaritans and the Jerusalem Jews, in the assertion that an official copy was brought from Jerusalem, to be transcribed and verified under the eye of king Ptolemy's literary men. And if this was done, and there was then the same contrast which existed for fourteen centuries before the invention of printing, between the verbal accuracy of the Jewish copyists of the Scriptures and the verbal negligence customary among the Greeks, then the accuracy of the transcription, and the tests used for securing it, may constitute the nucleus of fact around which, later, grew the stories concerning the accuracy of the translation.

3. But parts of the Scriptures had been previously translated. As to this, the testimony of Aristobulus, cited above, is confirmed by the circumstances. It follows that Ptolemy's translators, as a matter of course, incorporated into their work any previous work, available for the purpose, they found.

4. The external evidence, with which all the internal marks agree, goes to prove that the work was undertaken by men who appreciated the importance of a good text, and who had a good text, but who were also in possession of inferior texts, and whose work, especially the parts that were taken from previous translations, was greatly affected by the inferior texts.

5. Josephus says, *Preface 3*, that those who were sent to



Alexandria gave Ptolemy only the books of the Law, and not all the sacred records. This has been commonly interpreted to mean that they gave him only the Pentateuch, and not the rest of the Old Testament books. But Josephus makes the statement by way of explaining that he himself now purposes to make accessible to Greeks those other sacred records that were not given in Ptolemy's time. By these he cannot mean the books of the Old Testament, for these were in his day already accessible in Greek. It follows that by "Law" he here means the Old Testament, cf. John 10 : 34 ; 12 : 34 ; 15 : 35 ; 1 Cor. 14 : 21 ; Rom. 3 : 19. The other sacred records to which he refers are the various secondary sacred writings of which he makes use in different parts of his history.

This testimony of Josephus that the plan of Ptolemy's men included the Law in the wide sense of that term agrees with the Aristæan account. The descriptive terms there used are "many books of laws", *Ant.* XII. ii. 1 ; "the books of the Jewish legislation, with some others", ii. 4. The whole account implies a much larger collection than the five books of Moses. The idea that the king wanted less than the whole body of the then celebrated Hebrew literature is inconsistent with his purpose to put into the library all the known books in the world. The Christian fathers—Epiphanius, for example—are very explicit, mentioning all the Old Testament books, and some Apocrypha, as translated by Ptolemy. Clement, cited above, says that the plan included the prophetical Scriptures as well as the Law.

If we so far accept this testimony as to hold that the whole Old Testament, with some other writings, was included in the plan, it does not follow that we must hold that the plan was then completely carried out, and all the books translated at that time. When Lagus died, and the influence of Demetrius ceased, it is likely that many of their plans lapsed. The opinion of scholars is that the Pentateuch was first translated, and that the other translations followed, perhaps extending over an interval of several generations ; and this opinion is probably correct.